'You will be with me in Paradise'

Luke 23:39-43 (ESV)

[39] One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" [40] But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? [41] And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." [42] And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." [43] And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

This scripture is a very well known passage; Luke 23 gives account of Jesus being crucified on a cross. It also tells us that Jesus was not crucified on His own but was crucified with two criminals, one on His right and one on His left.

The two criminals had very different outlooks and attitudes towards Jesus. The first criminal was railing at Jesus. He just wanted to save his earthly skin. The criminal had no spirit of self remorse, guilt, shame or regret. He only saw Jesus as a possible power by which to escape the cross. He did not see Jesus as he truly was - a king to be followed. He never considered that he should say he was sorry and change his ways.

The other criminal was totally different. He was repentant; he respected Jesus, admits he has done wrong, and has the revelation of Jesus as He really is. Now he prays for help. "Jesus, remember when you come into your kingdom." *Both* thieves wanted to be saved from death. But both had very different attitudes about how they pursued their salvation.

I love how Jesus responds to the penitent thief because you see the amazing love and compassion that Jesus had for him. You get to see Jesus' mercy and grace outworked.

Jesus was at his lowest point, but even in His suffering, He was able to save the worst of sinners. The thief had no time to perform a lifetime of good works. He was being crucified on a cross but, in simply looking to Jesus by faith, received a place in Heaven.

'The word Paradise is a Persian word meaning a walled garden. When a Persian king wished to do one of his subjects a very special honour he made him a companion of the garden which meant he was chosen to walk in the garden with the king. It was more than immortality that Jesus promised the penitent thief. He promised him the honoured place of a companion of the garden in the courts of heaven.' - William Barclay

This is an amazing love story where we see, through Jesus, God's unconditional love given to even a condemned criminal. No matter what we have done in the past, or where we are in our lives, it is never too late to turn to Christ. It shows us that while there is life, there is hope.